

single instance of controversy, he had admitted the possibility of a rational interpretation. Luther can hardly be described as the slave of his own theory of the supreme authority of the Scriptures. He could discriminate between the merits of the various portions of the Bible, and even the degree of credibility assignable to them. He uses his learning and his common-sense frequently enough in criticism of them. But whenever his personal bias or the question of his own authority came into play, he was adamant in resisting opposition or compromise, and would turn on his opponents or his own reason with the fiercest of his grim epithets as a decisive answer to all objections.

And what is more particularly true of the attitude of Luther is true of that of all the merely doctrinal reformers towards those who carried subjectivity the length of differing from or ignoring not only the old confessions, but the new. To Luther and the doctrinal reformers a man like Sebastian Franck, who laid stress on the spirit, not on the letter, of the Scriptures, who knew of no other Church than that of the community of believers, and decried all formal ecclesiastical organisation, was an unspeakable anarchist. The life of a Franck was accordingly that of an Ishmael in religion, who was driven from place to place by the persecutor till he at last found repose in a premature death at Basel in 1543, and who, in spite of persecution, continued to write and print and vie with Luther as a master of popular prose in the exposition of his spiritualistic opinions. Schwenkfeld, who resembled him in his checkered life and his revolt against doctrinal Protestantism, was for Luther merely "that fool possessed by the devil."

There is, unfortunately, a sad inconsistency between the earlier and the later Luther in regard to the treatment of heretics and heresy. In his earlier fighting period he was the champion of a large meed of toleration. "Belief is a free thing which cannot be enforced." "If heretics were to be punished by death, the hangman would be the most orthodox theologian/" "Heresy is a spiritual thing which no iron can hew down, no fire burn, no water drown." "To burn heretics is contrary to the will of the Holy Spirit." "False teachers should not be put to death; it is enough to banish them."